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ABSTRACT

Studying the influence of mass media on people's lives allows students to view advertising in a new light. This lesson provides students with the opportunity to look at mass media in a critical way--students become aware of the tremendous amount of advertising that they are exposed to on a daily basis. In the lesson, by looking at advertising critically, students begin to understand how the media oppresses certain groups, convinces people to purchase certain products, and influences culture. The lesson is intended for students in grades 6-8 and should take four 45-minute class periods. The lesson plan presents an overview; lists "Theory to Practice" resources and other resources; cites student objectives; gives a 3-step instructional plan; provides diverse activities for the 4-day lesson; suggests activities for extensions and for student assessment/reflections; and addresses National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) standards. Attached is a 10-question form for advertisement dissection and analysis. (NKA)

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Critical Media Literacy: Commercial Advertising

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Grade Band

6-8

Estimated Lesson Time

Four 45-minute class sessions

Overview

Studying the influence of mass media on our lives allows students to view advertising in a new light. This lesson provides students with the opportunity to look at mass media in a critical way. Students become aware of the tremendous amount of advertising that they are exposed to on a daily basis. By looking at advertising critically, students begin to understand how the media oppresses certain groups, convinces people to purchase certain products, and influences culture.

From Theory to Practice

Morrell, E. (September, 2002). Toward a critical pedagogy: Literacy development among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 46, 72-76.

- Popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society.
- The raising of critical consciousness in people who have been oppressed is the first step in helping them to obtain critical literacy.

Semali, L. (November, 2001). Defining new literacies in curricular practice. *Reading Online*, <http://www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/semali1/index.html>.

- Television literacy affirms the need to teach children how to read and interpret television messages, including advertising.
- The time has arrived to broaden the canons of traditional education and the curriculum to include the expanding technologies of television, film, video, and computers.

Student Objectives

Students will

- Investigate the influence of advertising on their daily lives
- Engage in critical inquiry of mass media
- Identify hidden media messages
- Interpret messages presented through advertising
- Discuss the effect of advertising on culture

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Resources

- Advertisement Dissection and Analysis sheet
- PBS Media Literacy "Getting Started" activity ideas
- PBS Media Literacy quiz
- 12-15 copies of different magazines (e.g., *Teen People*, *The Source*, *Sports Illustrated*)
- Chart paper

Instructional Plan

Preparation:

1. Take the PBS Media Literacy quiz before beginning the lesson. After taking the quiz, click the "View full answers and sources" link. Print the pages that contain the answers to refer to as needed.
2. Print PBS Media Literacy activities ideas.
3. Secure copies of magazines. Students can be asked to bring magazines from home for this activity. If students provide the magazines, it makes the activity more connected to their own lives since this is what they are reading.

Instruction and Activities:

Day 1

1. **Opening activity.** Begin a discussion about television viewing habits and what magazines students enjoy reading by asking the following questions:
 - How many of you have a television in your bedroom?
 - How many hours of television do you watch daily?
 - What is your favorite television program?
 - What do you think about the television rating system?
 - What magazines do you like to read?
 - Do you subscribe to any magazines? What are they?

Explain to students that they are going to become "cultural investigators" in the area of mass media. Over the next few days, they will be investigating the role that advertising plays in their daily lives.

2. **Online investigation.** Schedule time in your computer lab for this part of the lesson. Each student should access the PBS Media Literacy quiz site and answer the questions presented. Ask students to record their scores after they complete the quiz. While waiting for other students to finish, they should review the questions that they answered incorrectly.

3. **Follow-up discussion.** Have students engage in a discussion based on the quiz results. Who is your most "savvy" television viewer? Be prepared with the correct answers to the quiz. Students may ask for clarification of questions they had wrong.
4. **Homework.** Instruct students to keep a record of the advertisements they see during their regular television viewing. Students should record the amount of time spent watching commercials and the subject of each commercial. For example, if a student watches three hours of television, they should note how much of that time was spent viewing commercials and the content of the commercial (e.g., products, television programming, public announcements). For products being sold, students should record the name brand of the product (e.g., Ragu spaghetti sauce).

Day 2

1. **Group activity.** Group students to compare the results of their television viewing. Groups of four to six students work well for this activity. Give each group a large sheet of chart paper and have students record their results by placing the advertisements they viewed into categories, for example, Products for Sale, Ads for Television Programs, and so on. When each group has finished, post the chart paper on the wall and discuss the results. Look for commonalities between each group's results. What types of things are being advertised the most? Are students surprised by any of the results? Ask students how much time they spent watching commercials.
2. **Print media activity.** This activity can be done individually or with a partner. Distribute magazines to students. Students should look through the magazine and count how many pages are devoted to advertisements. As they do this, have them record what products are being advertised. Once they have finished recording the information, students should compare their results with others. At the end of the activity, ask students to compare their results for print advertisements in magazines to the television advertisements previously recorded. Are there any similarities? What types of products are advertised the most?
3. **Homework.** Students should repeat the assignment from the previous night.

Day 3

1. **Opening discussion.** Have students report their findings from their television viewing. Compare to the results from the previous day. Are there any similarities or differences?
2. **Print media activity.** Each student should work with a partner for this activity. Give one magazine to each pair of students. Tell them to look through the magazine and find an advertisement that they like. Allow about five to seven minutes for the students to select an advertisement. Once an ad is selected, pass out the Advertisement Dissection and Analysis sheet. Have students answer as many questions as possible about the advertisement, based on the ad that they selected. As soon as two groups have completed their analysis, have them compare advertisements and discuss what they discovered. Continue to group pairs of students in this manner as they complete the activity.
3. **Whole-class discussion.** Once all pairs of students have shared their findings, pull students back to a whole group. Discuss what they found when analyzing the advertisements. Were there any obvious themes or patterns presented through the advertisements? (It is important that the ideas for this activity come from the students and not the teacher. The interpretations should be from their point of view and reflect how the ads influence their culture.)

Day 4

1. **Culminating activity.** Review the patterns and themes discussed from the television commercials and magazine advertisements that students viewed. What do they always see in television ads? Magazine ads? Which medium does the best job with accurate representation? Students will write a written response on how advertising affects their culture.

Extensions:

Use other activities from the PBS Media Literacy "Getting Started" activity ideas list to further investigate commercial advertising.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Teacher observation of dialogue between students
 - Written response synthesizing classroom discussions
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IRA/NCTE Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

7 - Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8 - Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

11 - Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



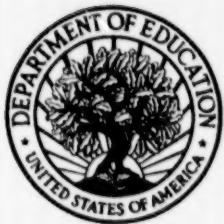
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Advertisement Dissection and Analysis

1. What is happening in the advertisement?
2. What objects in the advertisement can you identify?
3. With which general time period are those objects associated (historical past, present, or future)?
4. What are the people in the image doing?
5. What do the facial expressions or body language suggest?
6. What characteristics of buildings or environment give you clues to the location?
7. What are the people wearing?
8. What is the relationship between the people in the advertisement?
9. What is the advertisement selling?
10. What interests you the most about the advertisement?

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